

THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON JOB SATISFACTION OF NURSES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Roles of nurses are undeniably significant in providing healthcare services to patients together with other healthcare professionals. According to current census, Malaysia has more than 78 thousand registered nurses working at the government and private hospitals. However, our country is still in short of trained nurses every year. The small wage and job dissatisfaction seem to be among the main factors of early retirement and job migration. According to recent findings, emotional intelligence can also affect an individual's perception towards job satisfaction. Hence, the study aims to identify the levels of job satisfaction and emotional intelligence of nurses, to examine the relationships between job satisfaction and emotional intelligence; and also to predict the most dominant dimension of emotional intelligence that can affect job satisfaction. Therefore, a study had been conducted in four government hospitals. A quantitative method was utilized and 383 female nurses were involved. The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) by Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) and the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Short (EQ-i:S) by Bar-On (1997) were used. The results showed that the majority of respondents had moderate levels of job satisfaction and emotional intelligence; and there were significant correlations between these two variables. It is hoped that the results and implications of the study enhance the service quality of healthcare professionals.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, nurse, healthcare

INTRODUCTION

Background

Currently, Malaysia has more than 78 thousand registered nurses working at the government and private hospitals which make up 75% of the total healthcare workforce. However, the demand for the nursing profession is increasing every year since the expected use of health services will raise in the future. Like many countries in the world, Malaysia also has problems in finding and retaining qualified nurses (Saari and Judge, 2004; Ahmad, 2010; Siew, Chitpakdee & Chontawan, 2011). In 2010, News Strait Times reported that the number of nurses who left their jobs had increased from 440 in 2005 to 1049 in 2010 and 25,000 nurses have since migrated and work abroad. The government is committed to fulfill a ratio of one nurse for every 200 people by the year 2015 and the current ratio is at 1:375. There are 90 nursing colleges nationwide with a total capacity of producing 6000 trained nurses annually (Ahmad, 2010).

According to recent statistics, the country is facing a shortage of 7000 nurses yearly. Factors of shortages among others are early retirement and disappointment over the current remuneration. Large number of the local nurses migrated to the Middle Eastern countries due to the lucrative salary offerings. Consequently, migration and shortage of trained nurses has increased the workloads of the remaining ones (Ahmad, 2010).

In Malaysia, nurses comprise 2–3% of the female workforce and a large proportion of the health care workforce. Approximately two-third of nurses work in the government (public) sector where they are encouraged to work full-time and are generally required to retire upon reaching the age of 60. Because of historical and cultural reasons, very few nurses are male though small numbers have been taught nursing skills and trained as 'medical assistants' (Barnett, Namasivayam & Narudin, 2010).

The role of nurses is crucial to the health service delivery especially in preserving close relations with patients at hospitals or clinics. While at work, the nurses must always foster good relationship with other medical workers and also act as intermediary between health professionals and patients with their families. As the ultimate goal in the health environment is service delivery, it is important that nurses perform optimally and maintain acceptable levels of job satisfaction, hence, contributing to the vision and mission of providing better care and health to patients (Ruggiero, 2005; Param Jeeth Singh & Raja Jamaluddin Raja Abd. Majid, 2006). Due to this fact, mood is considered as one of the key factors that influence nurses' ability to manage work environment and to provide excellent service to patients. In this study, general mood comprises of optimism and happiness. Optimism refers to be positive and look at the brighter side of life. While, happiness is to feel content with oneself, others and life in general (Bar-On, 1997).

Job satisfaction is defined by Locke (1976) as “. . . a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences” (p. 1304). In other words, it emphasizes the importance of both affect or feeling, and cognition or thinking. So we have feelings about what we think. Thus, when we think of our jobs, both thinking and feeling are involved (Saari & Judge, 2004). In this study, the term job satisfaction refers to respondents' perception towards current work, pay, promotions, supervision, and coworkers. Thus, it is hypothesized that a nurse with a positive mood views work positively and able to absorb pressure caused by heavy workload. Besides that, the nurse will also manage to minimize discontentment or stress at work. In other words, positive mood can balance resentful thoughts and contribute towards achieving nursing work satisfaction.

Previous studies found that there were many factors related to job satisfaction among employees. For instance, factors that have been found to affect job satisfaction include work benefits (Fauziah Yahaya, 2003; Zawawi Mokhtar, 1997), work commitment (Kamsiah Kamin, 2003), leadership (Sylvia & Hutchison, 1985; Kalisch, Lee & Rochman, 2010) and many more. As for nurses, there were several factors found to affect job satisfaction and work commitment such as job stress, a management style of nursing leadership, empowerment, nursing work environments, and demographic factors such year of experience, age and level of education. For instance, Ruggiero (2005) did a study to explore the relationships and relative contributions of selected work (stress, workload, weekend off), shift worker health (sleep, depression) and demographic variables to job satisfaction in a sample of 247 critical care nurses. The study found that there were no significant differences among these variables. However, regression analyses indicated that respondents who had more weekends off per month, less depression and emotional stress more likely perceived less satisfaction in job. Therefore, improvements in scheduling and interventions designed may reduce depression and emotional stress. Then it may help to improve job satisfaction and aid in nurse recruitment as well as retention.

Siew, Chitpakdee and Chontawan (2011) conducted a study to determine the level of organizational commitment and the predictive ability of perceived organizational support, components of job satisfaction, including pay, task requirement, organizational policies, autonomy, interaction and professional status as well as years of experience on organizational commitment among 416 nurses in four state hospitals in Malaysia. The results showed that nearly half of the subjects reported high level of organizational commitment. This study also found that nurses in state hospitals were highly committed to their organizations. Therefore, they reported a high level of job loyalty.

Param Jeeth Singh and Raja Jamaluddin Raja Abd. Majid carried out a research among 330 staff nurses in Kuala Lumpur Hospital in 1996 (2006). The study conducted was to determine factors influencing job satisfaction and intention to resign. The majority of respondents (56.4%) were generally satisfied while 27.6% were dissatisfied with their jobs and the rest were neutral. The findings showed that generally respondents were dissatisfied with workload and rewards. However, their satisfactions were derived from interpersonal staff relationships together with status and autonomy. In addition, there were no relationships between social demography factors like ethnicity, age, marital status, duration of service as staff nurses, income and duration of contract as staff nurses with general job satisfaction. From the multiple linear regression analysis, predictors of intention to resign were ethnicity, age, duration of service as staff nurses and general job satisfaction.

Studies indicated that nurses who are satisfied and contented with their jobs are likely to stay with their organizations (Siew, Chitpakdee & Chontawan, 2011). Fisher (1998) argued that most of previous studies emphasized on cognitive aspects. On the other hand, hardly any studies discussed the affective qualities such as feelings, emotions and employee's mood in details. Fisher (1998) stated that the two concepts are distinct from one another. According to her, moods tend to be longer lasting meanwhile emotions are more short lived and a clear object or cause. For example, a moody employee can easily get angry in a quarrel with colleagues. Nevertheless, mood and emotion are inseparable; hence a moody person has an unstable emotion. Fisher (1998) in her research found that positive feelings will yield better job satisfaction.

The term emotional intelligence has also been popularized by Goleman(1995, 1999). He too stated that emotional intelligence is a combination of both mental and emotional capabilities. Based on his opinion, it is observed that emotional intelligence is one's ability to monitor and regulate own emotions or of others which in turn help the particular individual to behave or think. He also stressed that every individual have two forms of thoughts; rational thought and emotional thought. Rational thought assists an individual to think while emotional thought helps a person to feel. Thus, both thoughts are simultaneously required for an effective human interactions and positive control over an environment. According to Goleman's(1995)definition, he divided emotional intelligence into five main components: (a) awareness of own emotion, (b) management of emotion, (c) self motivation, (d) awareness of emotion of others, and (e) management of relationship with others

For the purpose of this study, Bar-On's (2000) emotional intelligence is referred to a non-cognitive ability and emotion management skills which influence one's capability to deal with daily routines. This matter is indeed a crucial entity in the nursing profession because it relates to the level of one's emotional intelligence. Undoubtedly, the nurses' emotional control in the relationships with patients and co-workers has obvious effects at their work place and in their daily life.

The nurses' aptitude and ability to control their own and others' emotion may produce beneficial results and have advantages toward patients as well (McQueesn, 2004). Once a nurse showed interest in the patients' emotion, physical and spiritual need aspects; the patients will respond accordingly and feel genuinely being cared for. Some patients may even show appreciations and praises to compassionate nurses. Freshwater (2004) shared the same opinion and stated that if staffs have the ability to control and express their emotion appropriately to clients, both parties will be beneficial; nurses' work will be less stressful and hence, better services to patients while the patients will have a more positive feelings and hasten the healing process (of physical and mental diseases).

Besides providing benefits to the patients, past researchers also found that nurses' emotional intelligence can also assist them to fulfill the current demands of nursing profession's qualities (Deshpande& Joseph, 2009). According to Goleman(1995), most successful individuals in the occupational sectors were not that bright in their schooling days. Likewise, those who were successful in their academic will not necessarily achieve the same

result in their social life or become compassionate for others. Thus, nurses with excellent academic qualifications and emotional control tend to be more successful in their career.

Abraham (2000) found that social interaction skills as one of the elements of emotional intelligence is the driving factor for an individual to succeed at work place. Positive interpersonal relationship with others will enhance job satisfaction of an individual and eventually lessen stress at work. In short, an individual with high level of emotional intelligence tends to avoid work stress, acquires job satisfaction and contributes excellent commitment to an organization.

Jacques (2009) has conducted a research among college students to find out the relationship among emotional intelligence, academic performance and course majoring criterion. The result showed that male students have higher emotional intelligence level than female students. Excellent level of emotional intelligence also tends to produce better academic performance. These findings are contrary to previous studies that indicated no significant difference between genders.

Researches were also conducted regarding emotional intelligence in organizations and at work. Most researchers found that a contented employee will yield high work performance and productivity (Hassan, 2005; Jain & Sinha, 2005). Meanwhile Orginska-Bullik (2005) has conducted a research among humanity services workers to find out the effects of emotional intelligence on work stress and their health status. The results showed an inverse relation between emotional intelligence and work stress; respondents with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience lower work stress. This means that a high level of emotional intelligence may balance stressful work among workers.

As Goleman (1995) said, personality has a strong influence on job satisfaction. He even proposed that managers should make the work environment conducive so that employees can perform their very best. He believed happiness and optimism give an individual a belief that he/she can successfully complete tasks and meets objectives regardless of any obstacles. A study of Khalida Rauf (2010) was undertaken to examine the relationship between optimism and job satisfaction. A random sample of 80 faculty members of Business School was selected. Results of regression analysis showed that there were 4% chances that optimism predicts job satisfaction among employees.

Based on previous literature, one of the issues for the healthcare administrators to critically reflect is job satisfaction. To date, there has been very little empirical evidence assessing the impact that emotional intelligence of key healthcare professionals may have on job satisfaction. The present study was conducted to identify the levels of job satisfaction and emotional intelligence of nurses; to examine the relationships between job satisfaction and emotional intelligence; and also to predict the most dominant dimension of emotional intelligence that can affect job satisfaction. One future significant of the study is to better understand the interplay between a person and a situation that influence an employee's satisfaction towards a current job. In particular, a better comprehension of the role of emotional intelligence is needed and has been largely overlooked in past researches.

METHODS

Samples

Twelve state hospitals in Peninsular Malaysia were divided into four main areas according to the four zones (northern, eastern, central and southern zones). There were 395 male and female respondents participated in the study. They were selected through simple random sampling.

Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was divided into three parts. Part one comprised of socio-demographic data developed by the researchers. Part two consisted of 51 items on emotional intelligence based on the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Short (EQ-i:S) by Bar-On (1997). Items were scored according to Likert Scale point from 1 = not true of me, to 5 = true of me. It included five dimensions as suggested by Bar-On (1997) which are intrapersonal, interpersonal, general mood, adjustment and stress management. Internal reliability test showed that the overall alpha level for this study is reliable (ranging from 0.694 to 0.766). The emotional intelligence scores are divided into three levels of low, medium and high. The instrument used in this research was translated by Najib, Che Su, Zarina, Suhaini, Suhanim and Wan Bee (2006) based on back translation techniques. Part three consisted of 72 items of the Job Descriptive Index Scale (JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) to measure job satisfaction. JDI assessed five dimensions of job satisfaction: work, pay, promotions, supervision, and coworkers. The scale is the most extensively validated employee attitude survey measures and reliable. Data collected was analysed using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profiles

The general socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. Respondents age were between 23 and 55 years (Mean=33.53 years, SD = 8.54). The majority of respondents were female (96.60%). In terms of educational level, the majority of the respondents were diploma holders (77.97%). There were 392 (99.24%) Malays and 3 (0.76%) Indians. More than 67% were married, 29.7% were widowed/separated/divorced, 2.28% had never been married and 0.25% had not answered. Most of the respondents have a range of salary between RM 2001 to RM 3000 per month (44.56%). With regards to the years of experience, most of the respondents being employed as a nurse less than 10 years (53.16%).

Table 1: *Socio-Demographic Profiles*

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	383	96.96
Male	11	2.79
Not stated	1	0.25
Race		
Malays	392	99.24

Indians	3	0.76
Age (Mean 33.53, SD= 8.54, Range = 23 - 55 years old)		
20-30 years old	209	53.04
31-40 years old	124	31.48
41- 50 years old	38	9.64
51 and above	23	5.84
Marital Status		
Married	268	67.85
Single	117	29.7
Divorced/separated/widowed	9	2.28
Not stated	1	0.25
Salary		
RM1000 - RM2000	138	34.94
RM2001 – RM3000	176	44.56
RM3001 – RM4000	34	8.61
RM4001 and more	6	1.52
Not Stated	41	10.38
Level of Education		
Bachelor degree	3	0.76
Diploma	308	77.97
Tertiary	12	3.04
Secondary School	66	16.71
Not stated	6	1.52
Year of experience		
Less than 3 years	137	34.68
3 - 6 years	73	18.48
7 – 10 years	66	16.71
11 - 13 years	34	8.60
14- 16 year	19	4.82
17- 20 years	18	4.55
More than 20 years	42	10.64
Not Stated	6	1.52

Levels of Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction

The first objective of the research is to identify the levels of job satisfaction and emotional intelligence of nurses in hospital. The second objective is to examine the relationships between job satisfaction and emotional intelligence. And the last objective is to predict the most dominant dimension of emotional intelligence that can affect job satisfaction.

Findings in this research were comparable to the ones that were conducted in many countries that portray moderate level of emotional intelligence (Jacques, 2009; Najib, Che Su, Zarina, Suhaini, Suhanim & Wan Bee,

2006). Generally, frequency analyses showed the emotional intelligence of the respondents is at moderate level (80.5%). This indicates that respondents at large were able to manage their emotion and of others in a sensible range (Jacques, 2009; Najib, Che Su, Zarina, Suhaini, Suhanim & Wan Bee, 2006).

For the intrapersonal dimension, the score showed majority of respondents have moderate level of skills (66.6%). This is an important skill that assists an individual to maintain self-care, awareness of own emotion, assertiveness, non-dependent of others and constantly improving own potential. Nurses not only deal with patients' emotions but also their own. In certain cases, patients may die despite various treatments and efforts; therefore, nurses need to engage in a self-reflective process to become aware of their feelings and emotions. Once nurses have the ability to identify their own emotions or feelings (apart from being aware of a situation), they will become more prepared (McQueen, 2004). However, this study indicated that there were some respondents (30.9%) who have low level of intrapersonal skills.

The majority of respondents' interpersonal skills were at high level (64.5%). Interpersonal intelligence concerns with the ability to empathize with patients or co-workers, to implement social responsibilities and to have interpersonal relationships with them. In this study, it shows that nurses had demonstrated such abilities. According to Goleman (1995), these interpersonal skills can facilitate social success because it helps people to form closer relationships easily with other people, recognize their feelings and react accordingly. Furthermore, the skills are imperative for healthcare workers especially when working hand-in-hand with other healthcare professionals.

The results for general mood dimension indicated that the majority of respondents (84.6%) were optimist and happy with their work and life. Application of these two traits during crisis at work helps to sustain mental and social well-being. In other words, nurses who are able to control and manage their mood when dealing with hospital's administrations or patients, believe that depressing situations may improve to be better. Nurses will eventually enjoy performing their tasks in any health institutions. The findings are consistent with Goleman's view (1995), as he deemed happiness as providing a belief to individuals that tasks and objectives can successfully be completed regardless of any obstacles. Moreover, cheerful workers are highly motivated in life and job. In addition, they anticipate success and tackle difficulties as well as considering obstacles as temporary features of the situation (KhalidaRauf, 2010; Tsaousis& Nikolaou, 2005; Landa& Lopez-Zafra, 2010).

As for the adjustment skills, result shows that more than 72 percent of the respondents had the skills to tolerate stress and control their impulses. Working at hospitals or clinics requires nurses to have technical skills, cognitive capabilities and other skills to cope with the complexity of modern health care systems and diverse behaviors of patients. Otherwise the nurses physical and psychologically health may be affected adversely (Tsaousis& Nikolaou, 2005; Landa & Lopez-Zafra, 2010). Undoubtedly, it is imperative for nurses to adapt to such work situations so that they may not succumb to the work load assigned to them which may negatively affect the service quality provided to patients.

With respect to stress management skills, result shows the respondents' score is mainly at low level (65.8%). Meanwhile, 33.7% respondents said that their stress management skills are moderate. Less than one per cent of the respondents claimed to have high level score of this vital skill. Apparently, most respondents have inadequate skill in problems solving, flexibility and reality testing.

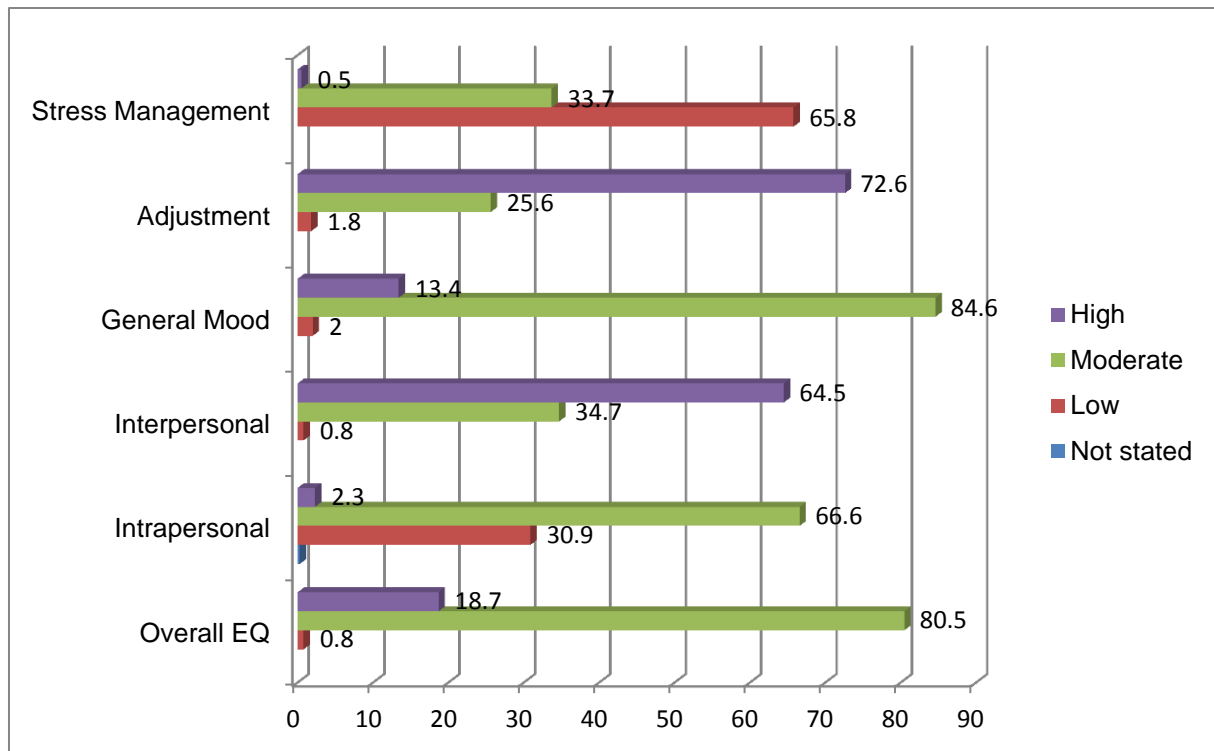


Chart 1: Levels of Emotional Intelligence

Chart 2 depicts the overall score of job satisfaction of the respondents ranged from 72 to 360 with approximately 389 (99%) of the respondents had a moderate level of job satisfaction. Close observation on each job satisfaction dimensions indicated that the respondents' scores were moderate for all dimensions: current job situation (74.7%), supervision (98.5%), promotion opportunity (97.4%), pay (67%), and coworkers' satisfaction (96.4%). There are several possible reasons pertaining to the findings. According to Siew, Chitpakdee and Chontawan (2011), nurses rated their job as satisfying because of the offered perks, working culture, availability of physicians and shared values. Nurses who work in government hospitals enjoy many benefits such as pension, annual leave, maternity leave, housing loan, car loan and medical insurance. Even throughout the economic downturn and the rising cost of medical expenses, nurses are able to maintain their quality of life with the benefits provided by the government. Moreover, in the state hospitals, physicians are always available for consultation during emergencies, thus, creating less stressful situations for the nurses. Working culture in Malaysia is also a positive factor as Malaysia still strongly preserves the Malay culture, which upholds the community oriented principles and shared values. These values create strong bonds and foster teamwork spirits. Nurses help each other when the needs arise. Although there are many positive factors, nurses merely rated their job satisfactions as moderate. Descriptive data reveals that most respondents have less than 10 years of working experience. According to Murrells, Robinson & Griffiths (2008), young nurses are still learning to adapt to the new environment and challenges at work, and optimal incentives and service rewards are yet to be received.

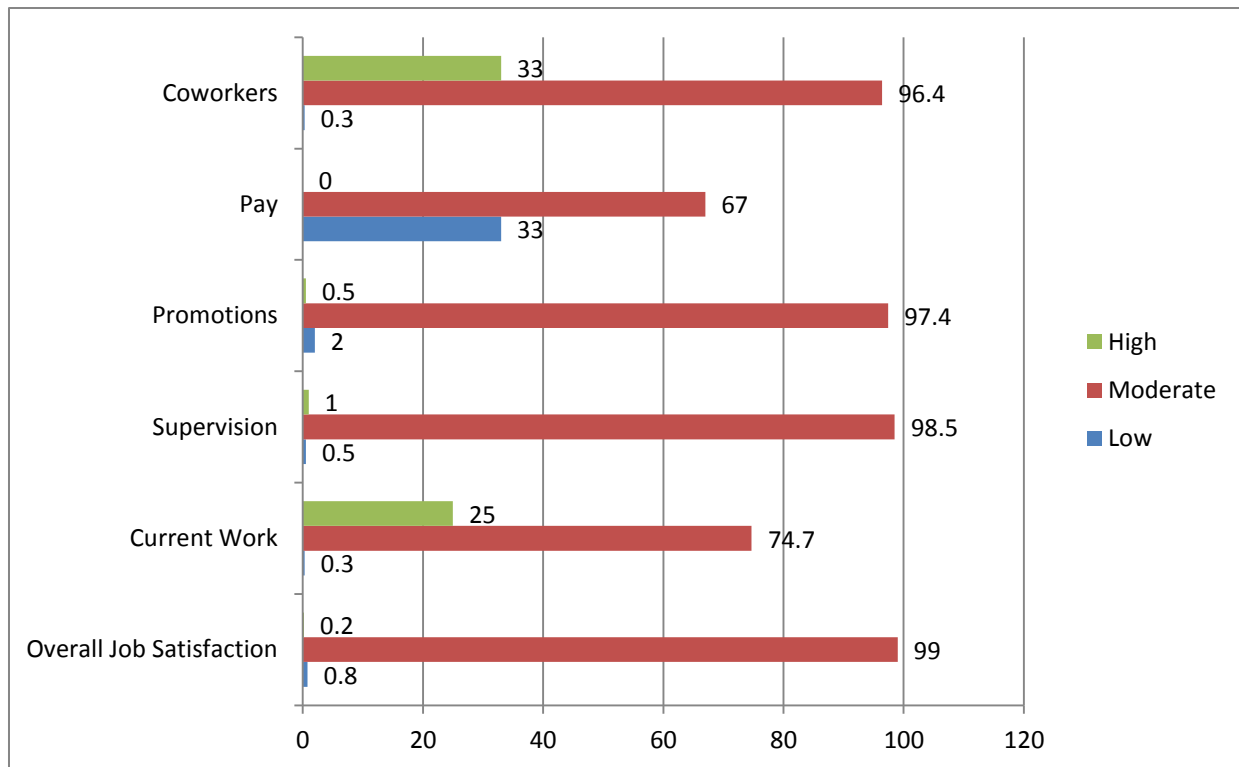


Chart 2: Levels of Job Satisfaction

The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Job Satisfaction

In order to ascertain the effect of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction, regression analysis was carried out as shown in Table 2. The adjusted R squares is found to be .076 ($B = 0.076$, $p < 0.01$) which means 7.6% chances that emotional intelligence is a predictor of job satisfaction. Three dimensions of emotional intelligence were found to be correlated to job satisfaction listed as intrapersonal ($B = 0.458$, $p < 0.005$), stress management ($B = 0.366$, $p < 0.05$) and general mood ($B = 0.536$, $p < 0.05$). Based on the results, general mood is found to be the most dominant dimension that has impacted job satisfaction of the nurses. This indicated that nurses who were optimist and happy would be satisfied with their jobs. According to Herzberg (1959), adequate extrinsic factors such as salaries, bonuses and incentives lead to high workers' job satisfactions. However, the study reported that optimism and self-contentment were also predictors to job satisfaction. Application of these two traits during crisis at work helps to maintain mental and social well-being. In other words, nurses who are able to control and manage their mood when dealing with hospital's senior staffs or patients, believe that depressing situations may improve to be better. Nurses will eventually enjoy performing their tasks at health institutions. The findings are consistent with Goleman's view (1995), as he deemed that happiness provides a belief to individuals that tasks and objectives can successfully be completed regardless of any obstacles. Moreover, cheerful workers are highly motivated in life and job. In addition, they anticipate success and tackle difficulties as well as consider obstacles as temporary features of the situation (Khalida Rauf, 2010).

Table 2: *Regression Analysis for Emotional Intelligence Dimensions Predicting Job Satisfaction*

Dimension	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Intrapersonal	.458	.159	2.880	.004
Interpersonal	.184	.053	.755	.450
Stress Management	.366	.115	1.989	.047
Adjustment	.025	.006	.096	.924
General Mood	.536	.132	1.998	.046

$R^2 = 0.090$
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.076$
 $F = 6.350, p < 0.001$

**P < 0.01

The study was conducted to determine the effect of mood on job satisfaction in the nursing profession in Malaysia. The overall findings showed that, the levels of emotional intelligence and job satisfaction were at moderate levels. Even though the situation is not alarming, the government or the health ministry must not consider it to be trivial. The findings can be utilized to improve and assist the nursing profession in aspects of education, research and practice. The following are some recommendations:

1. Provide attractive incentives to raise nurses' morale.
2. Provide appropriate short term motivation courses or training programs with the purpose of cultivating positive behaviors like optimistic and self-contentment.
3. Conduct new students intake screening prior to admission into the nursing course. Even though organizations cannot directly impact employee personality, the use of appropriate selection methods and a good match between employees and jobs will ensure suitable candidates are selected and placed into jobs most appropriate for them, which, in turn, will help enhance their job satisfaction.
4. Provide conducive working environment to create healthy and positive moods.

CONCLUSIONS

Job satisfaction represents the amount to which nurses like or enjoy their jobs, which is an important issue for both employees and employers. It leads to less job turnover, increased staff commitment and greater patient satisfaction. Nursing and hospital administrators need to focus on ways to increase job satisfaction. It is noted that mood can also play its part in nurse's job satisfaction. Clearly, the finding of the study indicated the role of mood is imperative to determine the nursing job's satisfaction. Its influence, however, might be reduced by other external factors but the importance of mood in the nursing job satisfaction is undeniable. Given to the present situation in nursing, it is strongly recommended that nursing administrators should consider and maintain the predictors such as optimism and happiness in the nursing practice to foster high level of job satisfaction. Furthermore, hospital and nursing administrators should provide a more positive and conducive working environment in order for the nurses to perform excellently and able to provide better quality of nursing care, which in turn, raising the standard of health institutions with efficient and effective health care service.

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